

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW #445-2

with

Samuel K. Kamaka (SK)

April 16, 1993

Kaka`ako, O`ahu

BY: Holly Yamada (HY)

HY: This is an interview with Samuel Kamaka at his office in Kaka`ako on O`ahu on April 16, 1993. The interviewer is Holly Yamada.

SK: Give me the signal.

HY: I'd like to expand on some of the things we talked about last time I spoke with you. One of the things I wanted to ask you about, you mentioned your father, was he *hana'i*d to the Keo`hoki`I family.

SK: According to a deed, the wording in the deed, of a property that he inherited up in Kaimuki on 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue, when I was trying to look up some genealogy on him, and I found in the [Hawaii State] Archives where they list ownership of properties, when they deeded the 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue property to him, he was mentioned as a *hanai* son.

HY: I see.

SK: So just from that I figured that they had adopted him. And later, I remember, when we were little children going to Kawaiaha`o Cemetery and decorating graves, but we couldn't read the inscriptions on the things then. And one day when I came back there during that time, I started looking around in the area and I found their tombstone. And then I figured, oh, that was some of the people that my dad had gone there to honor, you know, on special days like decoration day [Memorial Day].

HY: Do you know anything about your father's Chinese background?

SK: No, we have nothing on the people. Just I remember some old friends that I tried to look up, the old folks that lived up Nu`uanu, but they were all gone. I couldn't even find out who they were. I just remembered (my dad) going over

to their house on occasion and talking to them, but. . . . You know, when he moved to Kane`ohe and Wai`anae he was kind of very busy with his farm and so weren't too many family gatherings after my mother passed away, eh.

HY: Do you know if he had—there were other children in that family or was he. . . .

SK: No, we don't know of any other (related) Kamaka's . . .

HY: I was wondering . . .

SK: We don't have a birth certificate or. . . . On his marriage certificate to my mom, May, he said to show that he was born in Kihei. So we've looked. We've gone to every church in Kihei and tried to look up, find a trace of his birth, eh, but nothing. But the family, Keo`hoki`i, were from Kona. So apparently when they adopted him, he was in Kona. But I don't have history of his life there. Someday I'm gonna try to trace the Keo`hoki`is and see if there's anybody around that was, you know, that was related to them that's still around, yeah. I better get going quickly. Or you [*Center for Oral History*] might find something.

HY: The other thing I wanted to ask you about was his educational background. And also his `ukulele training with Mr. [Jonah] Kumalae.

SK: I don't know really too much about his actual training, but I knew he was a good friend of Mr. Kumalae. And we'd go to their factory or visit them. And he was—this Mr. Kumalae got an award, I think, in 1916 or something, when my dad was just beginning, at one of the World's Fairs in California. And it's noted on his, on the decal on his `uku—musical instruments that he'd gotten this award of excellence for the `ukulele that he had sent to represent his company. And then he knew Mr. Nunes, who was one of the first `ukulele makers here.

HY: Mr. Nunes.

SK: Yeah. Mr. Manuel Nunes. And whether he actually worked for him, we don't really have any tax records like that. You know, income tax things. We don't have any of that. But I know there was two other people, Mr. Ah Tau Kam and Mr. [Kaniela] Makini, who had their shop right near McKinley High School on the bottom side.

HY: Do you remember the name of the shop?

SK: No, they were just individuals.

HY: Was it their stores or was it out of their house[s]?

SK: No, they had a one—these two people they kind of work next to each other. And they were in Kaka`ako below McKinley High School where the Kodak

Hawai`i building is, right back on one of those back streets. And I remember stopping there with him. And they had their own trademarks. Makini `ukuleles and Kam `ukuleles. And they also made `ukuleles for other people, you know, music stores. Special order things. Probably learned from every, you know, visiting everybody. And a lot of things you learn from doing yourself, eh.

HY: Were they business competitors then when he started?

SK: Oh, yeah, sure. They were all making `ukuleles for a living, you know. And. . . .

HY: What about his academic background?

SK: That I don't know. I think he just went. . . . I know he was active at Kawaiahā`o Church. So probably most of the schooling was in connection with the church, eh. Because I remember when I was a little kid, he said that either this, his father or uncle was the mason that helped put up the fence around the church grounds, which included the cemetery. You know that metal fence? And I don't know if the father was Mr. Keo`hoki`i or. . . . But there's also, there was also one piece of property in Kona, but that's . . .

HY: Was that deeded to him?

SK: That was kind of, yeah. But that was kind of lost. I don't know whether he kept it up. I tried to trace it, but you know the markings was—you almost have to have it taken to court, I guess, to really find it, but that's kind of getting complicated now, you know over there. Because it just said this post and you go so many feet and you know, so. . . . I haven't found any relatives over there in Kona.

HY: So you don't know if the property is still deeded to him or somebody else?

SK: Yeah.

HY: And you had. . . .

SK: And he never mentioned it to us. So he could have given it to somebody.

HY: You had mentioned that your mother was a teacher at Liholiho?

SK: Mhm. Second grade teacher.

HY: Second grade. I was interested in her educational background, too.

SK: Oh, let's see. I'll have to look that one up.

HY: That's okay.

SK: I don't know what the schools are. My aunty and—I got one aunty left and she's in California. She was also a schoolteacher. She would know.

HY: What aunty was this?

SK: This is, let's see, Aunty Cecilia Gaspar. And her husband was a principal up in—they lived on Maui. She and her husband were both in education so he was a principal and she was a schoolteacher, elementary schoolteacher. She's still around. Maybe I can find out what. I know they wore uniforms, black and white, but it wasn't Sacred Hearts Academy. Could have been the [St. Andrew's] Priory up here.

HY: You think she probably got her education in Hawai'i? She didn't go elsewhere?

SK: No, she didn't, no. Everything was here. And it wasn't at University [*of Hawai'i*] either, those days.

HY: She was also a *kumu hula*, what do you know of her training or who she learned from?

SK: Oh, I don't know. When I grew up she was teaching the hulas from my aunties' *halaus*. Well they call 'em *halaus* now, but then they called themselves girls' glee clubs in those days. And there was the Royal—they had two glee clubs, the sisters, The Royal Hawaiian Girls' Glee Club and The Honolulu Girls' Glee Club. And they entertain at the Royal Hawaiian and at the Halekulani.

HY: That's Amelia [*Akeo Guerrero*] and Louise [*Akeo Silva*]?

SK: Louise, yeah. And did I tell you that Louise started the Kodak Hula Show?

HY: Yeah. Actually I was interested in what happened with those glee clubs during wartime? Just to kind of jump ahead a little bit.

SK: Yeah, wartime. My cousin, Lila [*Reiplinger*], would be able to tell you. 'Cause she was really involved with the . . .

HY: Hula.

SK: That's the—they were still entertaining. That's how she met Frank [*Reiplinger*], 'cause he was a wartime pilot. So they were entertaining . . .

HY: Her husband?

SK: Yeah. Yeah. So she—they were at the Moana [*Hotel*] and that's where they met. So she was dancing with my aunties. And. . . .

HY: Do you know if they continued to entertain a lot during that time?

- SK: Oh, I think so.
- HY: They were very busy? Do you know if they entertained . . .
- SK: In the beginning everything was blacked out, so everything had to be done indoors. But after a while they relaxed the lighting situation. And they entertained usually weekends, you know. And the evening show, maybe like a dinner or cocktail show. That was kind of what they did.
- HY: What kind of places were they performing? Were they mostly in the hotels or other places?
- SK: Oh, those were the three hotels that I remember—was the Banyan Tree [*Moana Hotel*] and Halekulani [*Hotel*], you know, outside where they call the House Without a Key.
- HY: The House Without a Key was outside of the Halekulani?
- SK: Halekulani, yeah. It was a open-air lounge where everybody came. And then the Royal Hawaiian [*Hotel*]. My cousin, Lila, would be more up on what they did during the war, the war years, yeah. Because we—I lived with them in the beginning.
- HY: You mean Kanekapolei?
- SK: During the war, yeah Kanekapolei, see.
- HY: Can you describe what it was like living in Waik\_k\_ at that time with the blackouts? And did you experience rationing?
- SK: Well, the blackouts were inconvenient, where they had to block up all the windows. And it was kind of—the circulation wasn't that great so. . . . We just covered the lights, you know, what do you call those? So they wouldn't be too bright. But the blackout didn't last too long, I remember. And rationing, well, we just kind of accepted that because they weren't able to bring in food supplies as quickly as they wanted to so they had to—don't eat as much, so you didn't put on as much weight. (Chuckles)
- HY: What kinds of food? [*Some of the neighbor islands experienced brief periods of food rationing, but on O'ahu, while there were some food shortages, there was no food rationing per se.*]
- SK: But we weren't to—I wasn't paying too much attention to what we ate, yeah, come to think of it. Just what my aunties put on the table. And lot of it was stews and fish and lot of chop, chopped things. No great big steaks and things like that. And lots of milk.
- HY: What about gas rationing? Did that affect you at all?

SK: With my working with the navy, I lived in Downtown. It wasn't too bad because I didn't have to drive over the Pali all the time. And we worked twelve hours, so when we travel it was early in the morning. Seven o'clock shifts so the traffic wasn't that bad, eh. And I had a Model, Model A car with a seat in the back. Rumble seat.

HY: Rumble seat.

(Laughter)

SK: Oh yeah. And two spare tires on the front by the hood. Was a real nice, nice-looking car. I haven't hardly ever see one like that anymore. That model anyway.

HY: Guess we can go a little bit backward again?

SK: But I can check on my mother's educational school for you.

HY: That's okay whatever you run into. I just want to go backward a little again. You went to Saint Louis [*formerly called Saint Louis College*], but your brother went to Kamehameha [*Schools*]. Why is that?

SK: He went to Kamehameha. He started out at Saint Louis and then eighth grade he went to Kamehameha because my dad thought he'd do better over there. And he knew the principal, they were good friends.

HY: He thought he'd do better academically?

SK: Yeah. He was getting into lot of rumblings.

(Laughter)

SK: Into fights at Saint Louis. My dad said, "Well, better. . ." Then he went to Kamehameha as a boarder and he lived there on campus for a little while.

HY: Oh I see. Was he the rowdy one?

SK: Yeah, he used to get into fights every now and then. But up at Saint Louis, before we go to our classes, after lunch, we'd all have to gather in the basement and we lined up in classes, see. And sometimes kids push each other around and sometimes we used to get into fights down there. Not real fights, but loud talking and things like that.

HY: But you stayed?

SK: Yeah, yeah. I finished up there.

HY: And back to wartime, you mentioned that your father worked part-time at Pearl Harbor. Do you remember anything about the duties he did? What was

his job?

SK: No. No I never paid—gee, I wish I could tell you.

HY: That's okay.

SK: Yeah. Yeah. No, I don't know what he did there.

HY: And then he had closed the store down . . .

SK: But it wasn't full time, see.

HY: Part time.

SK: Yeah.

HY: So he closed the store down and I was curious about the surrounding area. What were—how . . .

SK: In—up in . . .

HY: Yeah, I believe there were some damage in that area. McCully. [*Although Samuel Kamaka has no personal recollection of damage to the McCully area, there were newspaper accounts of fires and property damage.*]

SK: During the war, no, wartime there wasn't. December 7th?

HY: Yeah.

SK: No, not then.

HY: How was the—were there other businesses in that area?

SK: There was—next door there was a mattress factory.

HY: Do you remember the owner?

SK: And that was Ushijima.

HY: Ushijima.

SK: Ushijima Couch [*Factory*]. And across the street were some—lot of residences and little stores. And then down the road was that school. Right near Kal\_kaua [*Avenue*] there's a, the elementary school there.

HY: Oh, the Washington [*Washington Intermediate School*]?

SK: Yeah Washington.

- HY: Oh, okay.
- SK: Outside—well, most of it was homes. And then further up the street was the old Honolulu Stadium. And in that area they had some 'ukulele makers. That's where Kumalae was. The first factory.
- HY: Was the name of the store . . .
- SK: Where Saint Louis Clubhouse is now. In that particular area.
- HY: Was that the name of his store, Kumalae?
- SK: Kumalae 'Ukulele Shop. I think it was, yeah.
- HY: So as far as you know that area didn't sustain any damage?
- SK: No, not that I know of, yeah.
- HY: How did it affect that area? . . .
- SK: Most of the . . .
- HY: Did businesses stay open or. . . .
- SK: Yeah, they stayed open. My dad was busy, yeah, he was doing well. He kept —he had not very many employees then because lot of 'em went off. He had two, three regular ones. Harry [*Suehiro and Ed Souza*]. One was a fellow with, with a bad leg. He wore crutches, but he did most of the sit down work. And Mr. Suehiro was my dad's all-around man.
- HY: What kind of work did he do for your dad?
- SK: Oh, cutting wood and assembly work. And then. . . .
- HY: Did he do management things as well?
- SK: No, no, but he helped with sales up front. My dad did most of the management 'cause real, was real small business, eh. And I noticed lot of the bookkeeping was in his handwriting. The books that I have.
- HY: This was prewar time?
- SK: Uhm hm, yeah. 'Cause during the wartime they kind of. . . . He was mostly doing it mostly by himself, eh.

(Person interrupts. Taping stops, then resumes.)

HY: So you were talking about the shop before the war and some of the duties.

SK: And before the war, we would just go there after school and wait for our ride home (chuckles). Over the—we were living in Kane`ohe with my dad.

HY: How much would the `ukuleles cost? What was the range of prices?

SK: Was about ten dollars in those days. The first ones he made was three dollars.

HY: Would that be a mid-range price?

SK: Sounds fantastic.

(Laughter)

SK: Today, over hundred dollars just to make one, eh. About \$120—about \$125.

HY: To make one? Or to sell?

SK: For a plain one.

HY: To sell. Retail.

SK: No, retail is \$200, \$225. All depends on the store. All depends on their mark-up. Now this is—we talking about the standard size `ukulele. 'Cause the bigger you go the longer it takes and it cost more to do, yeah.

HY: You said the businesses, the other businesses in that area, generally, they did stay open after the war?

SK: Uhm hm. There was a . . .

HY: I mean during the war.

SK: The bed people [Ushijima Couch Factory], yeah, kept going. Of course the staff was some volunteer, the Ushijima, I think they went volunteered for the 442nd [*Regimental Combat Team*].

HY: How about the . . .

SK: And—but they were about our age, as young people, yeah. And they had lot of ladies working in the mattress factory, so. . . . Yeah, they were—they kept . . .

HY: They kept going.

SK: They kept going, yeah. Yeah.

HY: What about the residents in that area? Who were they primarily?

SK: In the particular area where my dad's shop was, there was lot of rental units. And . . .

HY: What kind of . . .

SK: Lot of the people around there were Orientals. Chinese, Chinese families and the Ushijima families. Those are the ones I remembered.

HY: The names.

SK: Yeah. And the renters up the street. Up in Kaimuki, where we lived on Elizabeth Avenue, we still had the home there, but it was rented. And there were lot of Hawaiians and part-Hawaiian people there in that Kaimuk\_ area. But in M\_`ili`ili, it was lot of Oriental, I remember, families. And then also—lived with my aunty in Waik\_k\_, but that was all cosmopolitan. Lot of—just like it is today, lot of people from different places. But out towards the zoo, closer to the zoo, that was all a lot of local families. And lot of my—the people in Saint Louis, that I went to school with, lived in that area.

HY: How did the . . .

SK: By Saint Augustine's Church. The old church.

HY: Saint Augustine.

SK: Yeah.

HY: How did the war affect that community in terms of just daily living, as well as social activities? Did it change at all?

SK: Yeah, you know I don't remember. . . . My aunties and them used to always have a lot of gatherings, social gatherings, but after the war started lot of people working long hours. They're helping out in the war effort so didn't have too much time to party. I know we didn't 'cause we working twelve hours a day and boy when you got through you're bushed. But we were young folks too, also. But when my aunties and them did celebrate, I had something to celebrate. That was—they really heard all the Hawaiian songs then. Because they were the experts.

HY: Was that---they had parties. Would it be something that the whole community would participate in?

SK: Lot of their music people came.

HY: I see.

SK: The people that they were involved with. And the neighborhood—immediate neighbors would all come over. And lot of the people—later from hotel, from the hotel clan that they associated with doing their music entertaining.

HY: Other hotel workers or people. . . .

SK: Management and visitors. They would come over, yeah.

HY: Did visitors come to the 'ukulele shop when you folks. . . . I know that you have tours now, that come through.

SK: Yeah. This is something that we started, but during my dad's time, no. I don't remember people would come in. But the shop was real small. They'd open the door and you could see the whole thing, eh.

(Laughter)

SK: One big room. And there was a period, this was, let's see. There was a period in the shop's history where, the Metronome Music, Mr. Lai, was interested in exporting 'ukuleles. So he and my dad went in the, for a little bit, on a joint venture and they made the Ka-Lai 'ukulele [Ka-Lai String Instrument Manufacturers]. Was Kamaka and Lai, Johnny Lai, from Metronome Music. And they had lot of—I remember they almost doubled the number of employees at the shop.

HY: Was this at . . .

SK: That was in the early—and I have to remember when that happened. What exactly what year. My brother might remember. And they tried, I think was at least for two years, lot of people working. I remember that, but exactly what year. . . .

HY: Did they use the Metronome Music or your father's place?

SK: My father's place. Yeah, just for the manufacturing. And they sold it at Metronome Music, the 'ukuleles. Once in awhile I get one in for repair. I don't really know how many they made, eh.

HY: Were the clients a lot different?

SK: The clients?

HY: Were there different people that wanted that product?

SK: No. Same local people. The only thing the name was for a few years was Ka-Lai instead of Kamaka's. Yeah, I guess that was an experiment for my dad, but it didn't last too long. At least two years for sure.

HY: You're not sure if it's—it had to have been prewar, but how far back?

SK: I think it was pretty close to high school and my graduation period. Hm . . .

HY: When you were . . .

SK: Tough question (chuckles).

HY: Hard to remember.

SK: Yeah you have to. . . . And some of our scrapbooks from before got misplaced or people borrow 'em, they never bring 'em back. And you get kind of foggy on some of the real dates, eh.

HY: When you were at Pearl Harbor working and you had mentioned that—primarily were civilians that you working with?

SK: Uh hm, yeah. This was at supply depot, where they brought in the freight and . . . . Mostly all local people moving the freight around anyway.

HY: Mostly local?

SK: Yeah.

HY: When the war started was there an influx of Mainland civilian workers. Did it continue to be primarily people that you worked with were. . . .

SK: Well the ones that I worked at the waterfront were primarily local.

HY: And it stayed that way through the . . .

SK: Stayed that way, yeah. And when—if we did need help, lot of it was military and then we had some lady military people, too. Women that were—and they did office work. But most or nearly all of the crew that worked the docks, like checking and moving freight around and the lumber and on occasion ammunition, were local, local stevedores.

HY: Okay. Do you have . . .

SK: But security was mixed military and the local. The private security that they had at night.

HY: When you were drafted, what was your feelings about that?

SK: Oh.

HY: It interrupted your school, the war interrupted your school [*plans to go to college*].

SK: Yeah, the war interrupted the school. And, actually when we got—we could have got drafted earlier, you know. Let's see I worked during the war three, four years for the navy without being drafted. So the fellows that were drafted earlier all went off. And some of 'em never came back. So when our

time came to be drafted, there wasn't a lot of pressure, you know. Most of the fighting was over and lot of the people that we went out with were just occupation forces, eh. So it was pretty safe. No real emergency or fighting going on. So I think I had it good. Well, as far as the timing of my drafting, drafting. And then I was only in for about eighteen months, eh. Then they give—then they let us go. So occupation troops down in Guadalcanal.

HY: Can you describe a little bit about what you folks did there?

SK: Oh, lot of it was cleaning up the island.

HY: Ordnance?

SK: Some, some was ordnance. But lot of it was getting rid of the old trucks and equipment that was abandoned. And what they did, they were putting things on these big barges and they tow it up to a certain area and they push it off. And they call it a certain graveyard for (chuckles). . . . But on occasion we would have to do some ordnance work and I lost couple friends that way. They just blew up, you know. But they stop doing that because they didn't have enough trained people coming in with us. It was too dangerous, yeah. But we cleaned up the island as best we could.

HY: Then did you do the same thing in New Caledonia?

SK: No, New Caledonia was more like R & R. But we—I served in the commanding officers' area and I was just in charge of the library then. All the literature and books, military library. And the friend I got to know next door was in charge of repairing all typewriters and office equipment. And he was also in charge of the slot machines at the officer's club. So I got to know that you can't, you can't really win.

(Laughter)

SK: They all set . . .

HY: You tested the theory.

SK: They all set on a percentage, eh. That's what I found out, yeah. And when a special holiday came around they lowered the percentage of take to sixty for us and forty for the club instead of sixty for the club and forty for us (laughs). So that's the way those machines worked. I found out.

HY: Were there a lot of people from Hawai'i that were in that. . . .

SK: Lot of troops?

HY: Yeah.

SK: Yeah, most of the people there. There was a lot of 'em. In fact, we found

enough to form a band, of musicians, you know. And I played the bass fiddle.

HY: The bass fiddle.

SK: Yeah. There was a quite large—lot of the people that were down there were people that were drafted at the same time we were. And we all went down on the same boat. Big, big ship, eh.

HY: Is there anything that you'd like to add? Anything that comes to mind?

SK: I wish I had a video camera those days (laughs). All we had was snapshots, yeah. But if you think of anything else that I need to look up, just send me a list and I'll try find it. Could be buried around in this room some place. Pictures.

HY: Okay, thank you very much.

END OF INTERVIEW